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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN CALIFORNIA.
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TO ASCERTAIN THE NUMBER, LOCATION, EXPERIENCE, AND FUNCTION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS, ADMINISTRATORS, TEACHERS, AND ELEMENTARY COUNSELORS WERE SURVEYED USING QUESTIONNAIRES. THE MAJOR FINDING WAS THAT SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND COUNSELORS AGREED ON WHAT THE COUNSELOR SHOULD BE DOING. TEACHERS VIEWED THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS VERY EFFECTIVE AND REQUESTED AN INCREASE IN THE SERVICES ALREADY PROVIDED. FEW COUNSELORS INDICATED A NEED FOR SPECIALIZED COURSES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE PERSONNEL. A UNIQUE ROLE OF THE COUNSELOR HAD NOT BEEN CLEARLY ESTABLISHED SINCE FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES OVERLAP THOSE PERFORMED BY OTHER PUPIL PERSONNEL WORKERS SUCH AS SCHOOL PSYCHOMETRISTS. THE DATA DID NOT SUPPORT THE HYPOTHESIS THAT COUNSELORS AS MEMBERS OF A SCHOOL STAFF RATHER THAN OF A DISTRICT OR COUNTY OFFICE STAFF CONTACT MORE PUPILS AND SPEND MORE TIME IN A COUNSELING RELATIONSHIP THAN OTHER PUPIL PERSONNEL WORKERS. (JH)

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RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 13 April 1965

BUREAU OF PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN CALIFORNIA

A report on what they are doing, what they believe they should be doing, and how principals and teachers regard their contributions to the school program

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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CALIFORNIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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SACRAMENTO

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN CALIFORNIA

Problem

Awareness on the part of school officials and boards of education of the need for better guidance services in elementary schools has led to a notable increase in the number of elementary school counselors employed in California schools in recent years. In contrast to school psychologists, school social workers, and child welfare and attendance supervisors, who generally work out of district or county offices, these counselors are assigned to schools as members of the principal's staff.

The present study was undertaken to ascertain the number, location, experience, and functions of these elementary school counselors. Other pupil personnel workers were purposely excluded from the survey in order to focus the effort on the relatively new and less well-defined position of counselor.

Procedures

The Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services, California State Department of Education, undertook the study in cooperation with the California Counseling and Guidance Association and the committee on guidance of the California Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Each association appointed a committee of three members to work with the staff of the bureau in planning and carrying out the study. The goals of the study were as follows:

A. To ascertain the number, school location, academic preparation and experience, and functions and duties of elementary school counselors in California.

B. To secure opinions on the effectiveness of counselors' work and suggestions on desirable modifications in their functions and duties.

C. To secure information on the academic preparation and personal qualifications thought to be desirable for such counselors.

D. To publish a report of the findings of the study.

In November, 1963, the Bureau addressed a letter to superintendents of school districts maintaining elementary schools, asking whether the districts employed elementary school counselors "by that title" and, if so, requesting the names of such counselors, the names of the schools in which they worked, and the names of the school principals. The names of 230 counselors and 262 principals, representing 57 school districts were reported. Responses from superintendents approached 100 per cent.

One questionnaire was prepared for counselors, a slightly modified version was prepared for principals, and a third for teachers. Questionnaires were

then mailed to the counselors and the principals. Principals were asked to fill out their own questionnaires and also to select two or three representative teachers in their buildings to complete the teacher's questionnaire.

One hundred and seventy-five elementary counselors in 50 school districts, or 76 per cent, returned questionnaires. Thirty-one per cent of the counselors responding were from two districts. One hundred and eighteen principals in 51 school districts, or 45 per cent, returned questionnaires. Three hundred and twelve teachers in 43 school districts returned questionnaires.

The number of children in the reporting schools was 133,125 or five per cent of all pupils in grades K-8 in the state.

Findings

A. Supervision

From responses of 175 counselors, it is evident that the predominant practice is to place the elementary school counselor--like his high school counterpart--directly under the supervision of the principal; 145 are so placed. Thirty counselors, although school-based, report that they work under the direction of other personnel.

B. Grades Served

Forty-four per cent of the counselors serve in intermediate schools, grades 7-8; 33 per cent serve grades K-6; the remainder serve other grade combinations.

C. Credentials

In addition to a basic teaching credential, 86 per cent of the counselors hold the pupil personnel services credential and 19 per cent hold an administration or supervision credential.

D. Positions Held

Sixty-seven per cent of the counselors have taught for an average of ten years and have counseled for an average of five years. Five per cent have held administrative positions for an average of three years.

E. Functions

The functions of elementary school counselors in order of their importance as judged by the principals and the counselors are shown below. These functions were listed on the questionnaire in random order and a short description of each was included as a guide to the rater. (Space on the questionnaire was provided for writing in "other functions", but because an insignificant number of responses was obtained, they were not included in the computations.)

FUNCTIONS OF THE ELEMENTARY COUNSELOR

Administrators Rank Order of Importance	Counselors Rank Order of Importance	Counselors Actual Time in Rank Order
Counseling	Counseling	Counseling
Teacher Consultation	Teacher Consultation	Teacher Consultation
Parent Consultation	Parent Consultation	Testing Program
Testing Program	Testing Program	Parent Consultation
Community and District Referrals	Administrative (guidance program)	Record Keeping-- Clerical
Administrative (guidance program)	Community and District Referrals	Administrative (guidance program)
Research Studies	Research Studies	Community and District Referrals
Record Keeping-- Clerical	Record Keeping-- Clerical	Research Studies

F. Distribution of Working Time

Counselors were asked what per cent of their time was spent in working with pupils, teachers, administrators, parents, and others. Their responses indicated the following distribution.

Working with:	Per Cent of Time
Pupils	50
Teachers	17
Administrators	10
Parents	12
Others (probation, welfare, medical, etc.)	11

No significant differences were found in the distribution of working time reported by counselors employed in K-8, K-6, and 7-8 schools.

G. Teacher Responses[1]

In order to relate the responses of principals and counselors concerning the functions of elementary school counselors to the opinions of teachers about those functions, the teachers were asked the question, "What kinds of services have you received from the counselor?" Of the 312 teachers who responded, 50 per cent were from three school districts and 50 per cent were from 40 school districts.

1. Services Received by Teachers

	Responses	
	Number	Per Cent[2]
Individual testing of pupils	202	65
Individual counseling with pupils	152	49
Helping with classroom problems	116	37
Participating in parent conferences	84	27
Administering group tests	58	19
Interpreting and evaluating test results	50	16
Teacher-counselor conferences	43	14
Taking disciplinary action with pupils	32	10

Counselors also help teachers by organizing student body activities, giving remedial instruction, taking over classes in teacher's absence, obtaining helpful information about pupils, group counseling, helping with attendance problems and home calls.

2. Additional Kinds of Desired Services

Teachers also were asked, "What kinds of services would you like to receive that are not now being given?" For the most part, teachers did not identify any new services, but expressed the need for additional or increased services of the types listed in the preceding item.

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[1] From this item on, the data obtained were from open-ended questions rather than from check lists or other structured questions.

[2] Some teachers checked more than one item.

3. Teachers' Rating of Counseling Services

Teachers were asked to comment on the effectiveness of counseling services. Their ratings follow.

	Number	Per Cent
Excellent or very effective	149	48
Adequate or effective	76	24
Inadequate	19	6
No response	68	22
Total	312	100

H. Important Competencies

Principals and counselors were asked "What skills and competencies should the elementary school counselor possess?" and "What personality characteristics should the elementary school counselor have?"

The majority of the principals and counselors indicated that proficiency in test administration and interpretation and proficiency in counseling techniques are the most significant competencies expected of elementary counselors. The ideal counselor is seen as one having skill in human relations, able to establish rapport with school staff and with children. He must be a friendly, warm person who likes children and people and who is able to communicate well. He should have a good sense of humor, be understanding, empathetic and accepting. Other important personality traits include maturity, patience and the ability to listen.

I. Ideal Program

When principals and counselors were asked to suggest an ideal counseling program at the district and school level, diverse responses were received but certain "essential" elements were described by substantial numbers of respondents.

1. District coordinators of pupil personnel services should be employed to direct and coordinate the program and give technical supervision to staff members in the central office and in the schools.

2. Counselors should be assigned to school staffs and should work under the direct supervision of principals.

3. Other pupil personnel specialists such as school psychologists, child welfare and attendance supervisors, and school social workers also should be available to the schools.

4. Coordination should be provided with other special services and programs such as remedial instruction, speech therapy, classes for mentally retarded pupils, etc.

5. Suggested staffing patterns ranged from one elementary school counselor for every school of 500-600 pupils to one counselor for every two schools of that approximate size or one to 1200 pupils.

J. Weaknesses

The majority of responses to the question concerning weaknesses of current programs related to the same aspects of guidance programs as were listed in the ideal program. For example, an adequate counselor-pupil ratio was indicated as necessary to an ideal program, whereas an insufficient counseling staff was most frequently listed by both groups as the major weakness in present programs. Another weakness pointed out by 27 per cent of the 175 counselors was a lack of communication among the pupil personnel workers. A significant number of counselors also noted a lack of communication with administrators.

K. Counselors' Preparation

Suggesting the educational background that elementary counselors should have, principals and counselors agreed that counselors should hold the pupil personnel credential, and they suggested graduate work to the M.A. level as desirable.

They recommended work experience, including teaching, as a prerequisite to counseling. Many respondents preferred that the teaching experience be with the same age group as the one to be counseled. They also recommended non-teaching experience both related or not related to children, and suggested that counseling experiences should be made available to teachers preparing for counseling positions.

Suggestions made by counselors for improving college preparation of elementary school counselors included the improvement of supervised field experience, making provision in counselor training for a program similar to student teaching, and making the content of courses more practical for this level.

L. Materials and Facilities

Materials and facilities considered essential to the counselor included a private office with telephone; availability of testing materials; adequate storage space for testing materials, supplies, and records; a professional resource library including vocational guidance information; and availability of cumulative records.

DISCUSSION

Principals and counselors in these California schools are in substantial agreement as to the order of importance of the functions of elementary school counselors, according to their responses. Undoubtedly, this is the major

finding of the survey. School administrators and counselors agree on what the counselors should be doing. From this basic understanding can come improvements, extensions, and innovations in guidance services in elementary schools.

A review of the ratings of functions in terms of their importance and in terms of the time devoted to them by counselors indicates problems that principals and counselors could jointly study and resolve. For example, how could more time be provided for parent consultation which rates ahead of test administration in significance but receives less of the counselor's time? Another area for potential improvement is that of record keeping--clerical work which both principals and counselors rated as least important in the list of functions but on which the average counselor spends more time than on administering the guidance program, arranging for community and intra-district referrals of pupils, and conducting research studies.

How to improve communications within the pupil personnel staff, between principals and counselors, and between teachers and counselors is likewise suggested as an area deserving attention.

Teachers view the services provided by elementary school counselors as very effective. When asked how the services might be improved, they did not name any new services but rather requested an increase in the services already being provided. (This was an open-ended question; a check-list might have elicited requests for new types of service.) Both teachers and counselors reported functions rendered by counselors that are inconsistent with most concepts of their proper role. Counselors in some of these schools were called upon to handle disciplinary cases, serve as teachers in the absence of regular teachers, and perform administrative duties unrelated to the guidance program.

Although both principals and counselors believed that elementary school counselors should have graduate training to the master's degree, relatively few counselors pointed out the urgent need for specialized college courses for elementary school guidance personnel.

The study did produce a consensus on the role and functions of elementary school counselors but it is clear that their functions and duties overlap those performed by other pupil personnel workers such as school psychometrists and psychologists and school social workers. A unique role of the counselor has not been clearly established as yet. This conclusion can be supported by noting the kinds of services teachers reported they received from counselors. The majority of teachers, for example, reported they received individual testing services from counselors; this is a major role of psychologists as well.

We may hypothesize that the difference in roles at present is mainly a difference in degree rather than in kind. The counselor as a member of a school staff rather than of a district or county office staff contacts more pupils and spends more time in a counseling relationship with them than do other pupil personnel workers. However, the survey did not secure data by which to verify that assumption.

Finally, all three groups--principals, counselors, and teachers--recognizing both the strengths and the weaknesses of present programs, voiced the hope that in the future more counseling services could be provided to elementary schools.